

IRIS CHANG MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Remarks presented by Adele Suslick, Uni High English Teacher

December 2, 2004

University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana
Spurlock Auditorium, 4:00 PM

As I was driving to school at 7 :00 AM on Wednesday, November 10, 2004, an amouncer on WILL AM 580 reported the death of Iris Chang. Disbelief and then shock were my immediate reactions. I pulled off the road and called my husband because I needed to talk about what I had just heard, to make some sort of sense of this tragedy.

I have always been very fond of Iris.

"Colorful" pales as a descriptor for her. She was one of the most passionate individuals I have ever known: very intense, very focused, totally committed to the cause at hand.

I first met Iris in 1983 when she, along with Bobs Winter, edited UNIQUE, the literary magazine at University Laboratory High School. Iris wanted to revive this publication last printed in 1980, and she had asked me to be the faculty advisor.

She was also my student in Senior English during the 1984-85 school year-the same year that Russell Ames was Uni's director, Warren Royer, principal, and the seniors "went punk" looking for "McJobs."

Her first published work may have been this haiku that appeared in the 1980-1981 UNIQUE:

Time
Moving steadily
Destroys, mystifies, conquers
Absolutely impossible to stop
Eternity

She continued to write throughout her Uni career, publishing two more poems in the 1983-1984 UNIQUE and several in the 1984-85 edition. Much of this early work focuses on change and impermanence.

Next to her senior picture in the 1984-85 yearbook, she quoted Victorian writer Matthew Arnold who said that

"Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, wildly effective mode of saying things, hence its importance."

She also quoted Einstein who said that

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Iris may not have considered knowledge paramount back then, but she knew a lot about a great many topics, as demonstrated by her outstanding performance in Senior English. What's more, she had an innate talent for public speaking and could nail an argument with compelling evidence. She took meticulous note cards, I recall. Grades did not seem to motivate her as much as her desire to understand something thoroughly, and she always looked you directly in the eye when she spoke. There was no doubt that she believed what she had to say and that she wanted you to believe it, too.

I spent a special weekend with Iris in 1998. She had recently returned to Urbana from her home in San Jose, California in order to receive the 1998 University Laboratory High School Max Beberman Distinguished Alumni Award. She delivered a compelling speech during the commencement ceremony. In her address, she said:

When I wrote *The Rape of Nanking*, I was shocked to see the extent to which genocide and bloodshed had stained the annals of history. Nothing in my education-not at Uni or the U of I or Johns Hopkins-had fully prepared me for the story of Nanking and other atrocities. And I was appalled not only by these stories but by the ease with which people forget about them-at the peril of civilization itself. The only thing that kept me going at times was the knowledge that a few people out there might be moved by the book

We were moved-as were those across the country who kept it on the New York Times best-sellers list for ten weeks.

The next day, Iris and I decided to visit an antiques store as an excuse to swap stories and catch up on each other's life. She talked a lot about having a child. In fact, she thought that pregnancy and the demands of the workplace might be the focus of her next project, but it wasn't. Instead, she wrote a brilliant book about the Chinese in the America, a book that I shared last year with my seniors and that I will use this year `with my freshman when we study *The Joy Luck Club*. Her son, by the way, is now two years old.

Iris became the most powerful voice for Chinese-Americans during the past decade. Her Uni education prepared her to do so. In my copy of *The Thread Of the Silkworm* she wrote

Thanks for teaching me many of the research skills needed to
write this book!

Your senior debate course had a profound effect on my life.

Conversely, her influence upon Uni has been enormous. She has shaped the way Uni students view twentieth-century Asian history. She has taught them not to stand silent in the face of injustice. And her books frequently find their way into classroom discussion.

Indeed, Iris lives on at University Laboratory High School. Students know about her and applaud her work. They see her as a woman who has changed the world in meaningful ways. What's more, she has endowed them with a rich sense of social justice. They, too, want to enlighten. They, too, want to tell a good story. They, too, want to make a difference.

And when they do these things-as I know they will-they affirm the life and dreams of Iris Chang.

I close with Iris's own words about the dawn of a new day; she wrote them when she was a junior at Uni:

Over the edge of the earth
Banishing all the darkness
To reveal a new day's birth
The sun, growing more vivid,

And taking a golden hue
Transfoms a magenta sky
Into a deep azure blue.

阿黛尔·苏斯利克老师在张纯如追思会上的讲话

2004年12月2日下午四点
伊利诺伊大学厄本那香槟分校
斯珀劳克报告厅

2004年11月10日早上7点，在我开车去学校上班的路上，WILL AM 580电台的主持人播报了张纯如的死讯。感到难以置信和震惊的我当即停下车，打通了我先生的电话，因为我需要谈谈我听到的这个消息，想理解这个悲剧。

我一直非常喜爱纯如。

“多姿多彩”仍不足以描述她。她是我所见过最富有激情的人，非常热忱、专注、对手上的工作会全情投入。

我第一次认识纯如是在1983年，当时她和鲍勃·温特一起编辑大学实验高中的文学杂志《特立独行》（UNIQUE）。纯如打算将这份1980年停刊的杂志复刊，并请我去做指导老师。

她还是我1984-85年的12年级英文课的学生，那一年拉塞尔·艾米斯是校董、沃伦·洛伊尔担任校长。还记得四年级生中朋克风盛行，学生流行找“麦当劳工”。

纯如的第一篇发表的作品应该就是这首发表在1980-1981年《特立独行》上的短诗：

时光

稳步前行

毁灭，神秘，征服

绝不止步

即成永恒

她在实验高中时期一直坚持写作，1983-84年又发表了两首诗作，1984-85年发表了另外几首。这些早期作品大都表现了变化和无常的主题。

在她的1984-85的年鉴毕业照片旁边，她引用了维多利亚时期的作家马修·阿诺德的名言：

“诗歌就是描述事物最美丽、最深刻和最有效的表达方式，其重要性就在于此。”

她还引用了爱因斯坦的名言：“想象力比知识更重要。”

纯如也许不认为知识至关重要，但是她在高级英文课中的出众表现显示了她在很多课题上的见识广博。更重要的是，她在演讲方面有与生俱来的天赋，她善于用令人信服的证据进行论证。我记得她记录的笔记卡严谨细致，她不热衷追求分数而是渴望完整地理解事物，并且她在讲话的时候总是直视着你的眼睛。无疑，她相信着她所说的事情，也希望你能相信。

1998年我曾经和纯如共度了一个特殊的周末。她刚刚从她在加州圣何塞的家回到厄本纳来领取1998年的实验高中卓越校友奖。她在开幕式上做了一个精彩的演讲。在她的演讲中，她说道：“当我写作《南京大屠杀》时，我震惊地看到种族灭绝和流血事件在多大程度上玷污了历史记载。我的教育中，无论是我在实验高中、伊大或者约翰霍普金斯大学所受的教育，都没有给我足够的准备去面对南京的故事和其它的暴行。我不仅仅震惊于这些故事，而且震惊于人们如此易于遗忘，而这种行为会威胁到人类文明本身。知道有一些人会因为我的书而感动，这是很多时候推动我前进的唯一动力。”

是的，我们的确为之感动，更有那些全国各地的读者，使这本书在《纽约时报》的畅销书榜上停留了十个星期。

第二天，纯如和我决定去一家古董店见面叙旧聊天。其间她谈到了很多生孩子的想法。那时她以为怀孕和职业的需要将会是她接下来的关注重点。但事实并非如此，相反，她又写出了一部关于美国华人的精彩著作。去年我曾经和我毕业班的学生分享了这本书，今年我将在与我的新生们学习《喜福会》的时候参考阅读这本书。时光荏苒，纯如的儿子今年已经两岁了。

得益于她在实验高中的教育，张纯如在过去的十年里，成为华裔美国人最有力的声音。在她送给我的她出版的第一本书《蚕丝》中，她写道：

“感谢您教给我写作这本书所需要的研究技巧！您的高级辩论课对我的人生有深远的影响。”

反过来，她也给予了实验高中巨大的影响。她影响了实验高中的学生对于二十世纪亚洲历史的理解，她教会学生们在非正义面前不要保持沉默。她的作品也常常进入学生的课堂讨论。

事实上，张纯如仍然活在实验高中，学生们了解她并为她的成就喝彩。他们把她视为一位以有意义的方式改变世界的女性，更重要的是，她赋予了实验高中的学生们丰富的社会正义感。他们也想要像她一样启发世人，也想要讲述一个好故事，也想要有所作为。

当他们做这些事情的时候，我知道他们会肯定张纯如的生命与梦想。

此刻，我选择用纯如在11年级时创作的一首关于黎明的部分诗句作为结尾：

在大地的尽头，
赶走所有的黑暗，
为开启新的一天……
阳光，活泼成长，
用金色
把紫红的天穹
染成蔚蓝。

（杨惠翻译，盛捷校对，8/6/2018）